Revitalizing Art + Design Education Through Expanded Notions of Community-Based Art Education

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Simplistic views of community-based art education (CBAE) commonly cast it as a feel-good community-building activity. However, as a scholar and an educator, I have found that in practice, CBAE is more often intricate and expansive, with an abundance of interwoven social, affective, and cognitive outcomes (Blatt-Gross, 2017a, 2017b, 2022, 2023). By extension, the richly contextualized learning that occurs through CBAE carries implications for how we conceptualize not just curriculum development but also program revitalization in the field of art education. As the field of art education undergoes perpetual reshaping and responds to increasing demands, utilizing CBAE as a theoretical perspective for these purposes evokes several key assumptions on which many scholars agree: CBAE (1) builds on existing assets, (2) relies on extensive research and responsiveness, (3) demands creative problem solving, and (4) is only possible through the collaboration of many individuals who contribute diverse strengths and skill sets (Knight et al., 2015; Krensky & Steffen, 2009; Lawton et al., 2019). Much like good leadership, CBAE prioritizes listening and empathy and "adjusts to the situation at hand" while "develop[ing] a sense of community" and "establish[ing] a culture of mutual respect" (National Art Education Association [NAEA] Core Leadership Competencies, 2021, pp. 3, 4; Figure 1). These ideals are also relevant to teacher preparation programs, where we hope to instill future art educators with the capacity to create a sense of community within their classrooms.

This article articulates how a CBAE-driven theoretical framework can inform and inspire leaders in the field who are in a position to rethink or revitalize the curriculum of an art + design education department. While this framework was specifically developed to invigorate the program I currently oversee as an outcome of my experience with the 2022 NAEA School for Art Leaders, it can be generalized and applied to other settings with the intent of fully contextualizing meaningful learning for preservice art educators or K–12 students. Further, it can serve as a potential prototype for repositioning art teacher preparation programs as they struggle to meet the changing needs of future educators.

The Context

Originating in the 1870s in part as the Philadelphia College of Art, the University of the Arts (UArts) has a long history of arts education and is headquartered in Hamilton Hall, the oldest extant building on Broad Street (Figure 2). Stepping into a new position as the program director and professor of art + design education at UArts at the start of the 2022–2023 academic year, I understood that the Master of Arts in Teaching in Visual Arts program needed an advocate. The curriculum, facilities, enrollment, and history of the program all indicated a need for updates and investments that

School for ART LEADERS

at Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art

CORE LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES

NAEA Leadership Development Task Force Report, March 2014; Updated by the NAEA Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Commission, June 2021

The NAEA Leadership Development Task Force spent a considerable amount of time identifying the leadership competencies that are essential for an art educator to excel as a leader. In developing these competencies, the group considered the various contexts in which the art educator would have a leadership role. These may include the individual's own work context as well as a volunteer leadership role in NAEA or a state/province affiliate.

SELF

1. INCREASING SELF-AWARENESS

An effective leader:
- Behaves with authenticity
- Knows own ability, expertise, strengths, self-limitations, and leadership style
- Admits to mistakes and learns from them
- Maps their positionality to understand privilege and oppression
- Prioritizes self-care
- Demonstrates humility
- Tolerates ambiguity
- Uses power effectively and responsibly
- Fosters own creativity

2. DEMONSTRATING ETHICS AND INTEGRITY

An effective leader:
- Exhibits honor, truthfulness, trustworthiness, and transparency
- Uses a good inner compass to guide ethical decisions
- Maintains strong ethical standards

OTHERS

1. COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY AND STRATEGICALLY

An effective leader:
- Uses and reads nonverbal cues (situational awareness)
- Listens effectively
- Is open to input
- Tells useful stories
- Is aware of their implicit bias and actively seeks to overcome it
- Adjusts to the situation at hand
- Employs contemporary communication channels

2. DEVELOPING OTHERS

An effective leader:
- Leads by example
- Approaches others with empathy
- Prepares others to lead/advocate
- Recognizes ability and expertise in others
- Challenges others to grow

ORGANIZATION

1. SETTING VISION AND STRATEGY

An effective leader:
- Understands and uses creative processes to identify opportunities and solve complex challenges
- Creates a shared, clear vision
- Connects the vision, mission, and planning efforts
- Shifts strategies based on the needs of stakeholders
- Recognizes and acts on opportunity
- Aligns ED&I goals with the mission and vision
- Collaborates with key stakeholders to develop a strategic plan for ED&I
- Spends time on activities that make an impact
- Innovates and responds with flexibility
- Plans strategically, understanding the external context

EXTERNAL FOCUS

1. INFLUENCING POLICY THROUGH CONNECTIONS WITH DECISION MAKERS

An effective leader:
- Positively influences others regarding art/art education in the human experience
- Understands the role of the organization(s) within a broader context

2. DEFINING AND SOLVING PROBLEMS

An effective leader:
- Defines complex external problems clearly
- Develops effective solutions
- Breaks problems/solutions into manageable pieces to address

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SELF

3. DEVELOPING ADAPTABILITY

An effective leader:
- Responds to change and is able to make changes
- Is flexible

4. EXHIBITING LEADERSHIP STATURE

An effective leader:
- Shifts effectively among leadership roles (from educational settings to other venues)
- Sustains personal engagement and participation
- Maintains an ongoing cycle of personal learning, reflection, and growth with ED&I

OTHERS

3. BUILDING EFFECTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

An effective leader:
- Builds trust
- Is present with people
- Approaches differences with cultural humility
- Manages conflict constructively
- Spends time among people
- Develops a sense of community
- Breaks down silos and bridges group boundaries

4. CREATING BALANCED, EFFECTIVE TEAMS

An effective leader:
- Values and recruits differences/diversity
- Establishes a culture of mutual respect
- Embraces and uplifts nontraditional indicators of success
- Matches people on the team to jobs that fit their interests and skills

5. SHARING POWER

An effective leader:
- Shares responsibility and duties, is team-oriented
- Works toward racial justice when recalibrating power dynamics
- Values others' contributions and gives credit when due
- Employs mutual inquiry and learning

6. SUPERVISING AND COORDINATING ACTIVITIES

An effective leader:
- Provides support and guidance to others and maintains accountability for completing tasks
- Uses collaborative language and behaviors

ORGANIZATION

2. MANAGING CHANGE

An effective leader:
- Is comfortable with change
- Takes informed risks
- Creates a culture of innovation
- Drives change effectively
- Educates and informs about issues at hand
- Ensures internal alignment

3. MAKING DECISIONS

An effective leader:
- Provides enough context and background for effective decisions
- Thinks critically about decisions
- Considers the needs of those who have been marginalized
- Is able to lead decision-making processes

4. EVALUATING PROGRAMS AND PROPER USE OF RESOURCES (BUDGETS)

An effective leader:
- Ensures ongoing evaluation of programs
- Keeps accurate records
- Ensures the fiscal health of the organization

5. DEVELOPING BOARDS/GOVERNANCE

An effective leader:
- Upholds the constitution
- Sets effective policy
- Protects the integrity of the organization

EXTERNAL FOCUS

3. DEVELOPING NETWORKS

An effective leader:
- Formulates strategies for collaborating across organizations
- Seeks to expand their network with people from different backgrounds
- Manages and utilizes conflict appropriately when collaborating with other organizations

4. DELIVERING CLEAR, CONCISE, TAILORED EXTERNAL MESSAGES

An effective leader:
- Knows and understands stakeholders
- Speaks for the organization
- Uses inclusive language
- Develops clear messages that clarify complex issues

5. DEVELOPING EXPERTISE IN THE EXTERNAL CONTEXT

An effective leader:
- Researches external influences to find relevance to the context of art education
- Clarifies how external influences affect art education
- Provides substantive information to the membership

Figure 1. NAEA Core Leadership Competencies.

were long overdue, and I was offered the spectacular opportunity to rethink what art education can be at one of our nation's oldest arts institutions. All programs have strengths and areas for improvement. Effective leaders are able to not just recognize but capitalize on both by casting needs as opportunities. In this respect, the asset-centered mindset of CBAE—with its focus on what makes a community distinct and extraordinary—is particularly useful (Lawton et al., 2019).

At the same time, the teacher shortage is making itself known, especially in our home city of Philadelphia, which had numerous unfilled openings for art teachers in the district at the start of the academic year and is scrambling to hire teachers with emergency permits or no certification at all. As a Pennsylvania Department of Education–accredited teacher certification program on the Avenue of the Arts in the heart of Center City, UArts is uniquely poised to help local teachers meet the certification requirements necessary

to fulfill their contractual obligations to begin working toward certification. Further, UArts is one of only two institutions in the city that offer a Teacher Intern Certification route through which uncertified art teachers who are already employed in a full-time position can concurrently earn their certification while using their teaching position as their field experience.

Simultaneously, discussions with faculty members and local administrators reveal that in the School District of Philadelphia, preservice and in-service teachers are often ill-prepared to manage the unique set of challenges that accompanies urban teaching. Alternately, district leadership reports that teachers who are adept at navigating urban classrooms are often unable to foster the level of creativity that distinguishes good lessons from mediocre ones.

UArts, whose mission is simply to advance human creativity, offers a uniquely creative environment that is poised to foreground and make transparent methods for teaching purposeful creativity while honing best practices in art education. In contrast, the current art + design education curriculum is still heavily influenced by discipline-based art education, which originated in the countercurrents to Lowenfeld's child-centered creative self-expression and affords little attention to teaching creativity with intent or nuance (Zimmerman, 2010). As an effective leader "connects the vision, mission and planning efforts" (NAEA, 2021, p. 4), a shift toward explicit creativity offers an opportunity to align

Figure 2. Hamilton Hall, UArts's flagship building on the Avenue of the Arts in Philadelphia, and the home of the Art + Design Education program.

our program more closely with the stated mission of the university. In addition, this affords an opportunity to surface the tensions and dilemmas that surround creativity in education and to imbue our program with the wise, humane creativity that leverages possibility thinking toward aims of social justice and the common good (Craft, 2015).

Recognizing some of our existing assets, UArts's Art + Design Education faculty members already offer robust instruction about students with diverse needs and trauma-informed art education, which will benefit future teachers regardless of where they work. Based on the state of education emerging from the pandemic, students and teachers alike have experienced some form of trauma in recent years, and the program's existing attention to this issue is an asset that deserves additional nourishing.

As a result, I envision the future of UArts's Art + Design Education program as one that foregrounds purposeful creative-thinking habits and collaborative practices while integrating asset-based, trauma-informed art education with opportunities to further develop a teaching repertoire for preservice educators in urban, suburban, and rural contexts.

A Framework for Revitalization

This project served as a first step to a major program overhaul by mapping out the many arenas in which revitalization must happen, inevitably informed by input from a range of stakeholders, including existing faculty members, cooperating school districts, community partners, students, and alumni, as well as my own background studying and teaching CBAE. My commitment to CBAE stems from an interest in social cognition—knowing that the content we tend to find meaningful is such because our brains flag socially and emotionally relevant information as important. Simply put, context matters. Through this logic, positioning learning (and artmaking) in collaborative, community-based contexts has potential benefits for not just social well-being but also cognition, by allowing for authentic coproduction and realization of ideas. This premise intersects with all four domains of the Core Leadership Competencies: self, others, organization, and external focus. Lawton et al. (2019) proposed five guiding principles of CBAE (educational, reciprocal, empowering, collaborative, and transformational) that model ideals for both ad hoc community-driven projects and larger educational structures and systems. If we apply the CBAE theoretical framework to not just individual courses, but to the program as a whole, the outcome is ideally the larger contextualization of all learning, transforming the department itself into a meaningful "community of practice" (Wenger, 1998, p. 5). Although this model grew out of the immediate needs of my position, utilizing an expanded CBAE ideology for program revitalization can be a useful tool that might be adapted and applied to other situations. The following framework can be used for such purposes.

The model (Figure 3) identifies five key areas that are opportune for the application of CBAE strategies to foster revitalization (faculty, facilities, curriculum, community, and communication). Such mapping creates visual references for reflecting, documenting, and wayfinding (Gates, 2023)—key steps to envisioning and realizing new programs. Below I will describe the potential for CBAE to be applied in each area and offer details specific to the Art + Design Education program at UArts, but this is a work in progress, and these are intended merely as examples, not as limitations for adaptation. The descriptions below further detail the intersections with more traditional notions of community within and beyond the university that must be engaged and activated as a catalyst for revitalization.

Facilities

In CBAE, adequate space is a logistical baseline. No project is realized without the resources to do so—including the space and materials necessary to gather and create a large-scale project. Having appropriate space and resources to do the type of work that needs to be done is a basic need of all programs. At a minimum, most art education programs need an adequate studio space with standard amenities (such as sinks, storage, worktables, and up-to-date technology), classroom and seminar space, and faculty office space and a student lounge. Space for the full spectrum of giving–gathering and disconnecting–connecting is important to cultivate a climate of creative well-being (Henry, 2018).

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Previously housed in the newer Terra Hall, the Art + Design Education department was shuffled around to multiple different locations before landing on the top floor of Hamilton Hall, the oldest extant building on Broad Street in Philadelphia. In addition to having some deferred maintenance and historical structure dilapidation, the primary studio had outdated technology, little climate control, and no sink or running water. Much of my 1st year has been dedicated to stretching a limited budget to bring this space into the 21st century with new technology, updated furniture, and a new student lounge and sink, so that it is befitting of the high caliber and forward-looking education we should be delivering to our preservice teachers. Admittedly, funding can be challenging for significant renovations, and capital campaigns as well as grant opportunities may be necessary to support large-scale changes. Getting creative with small-scale, low-budget improvements can also have a surprisingly large impact, and I have found that freshly cleaned and reorganized spaces unlock unexpected possibilities and new mindsets.

Communities: Several internal communities need to be activated, including student and faculty communities who are directly affected by the quality of their living and working space.
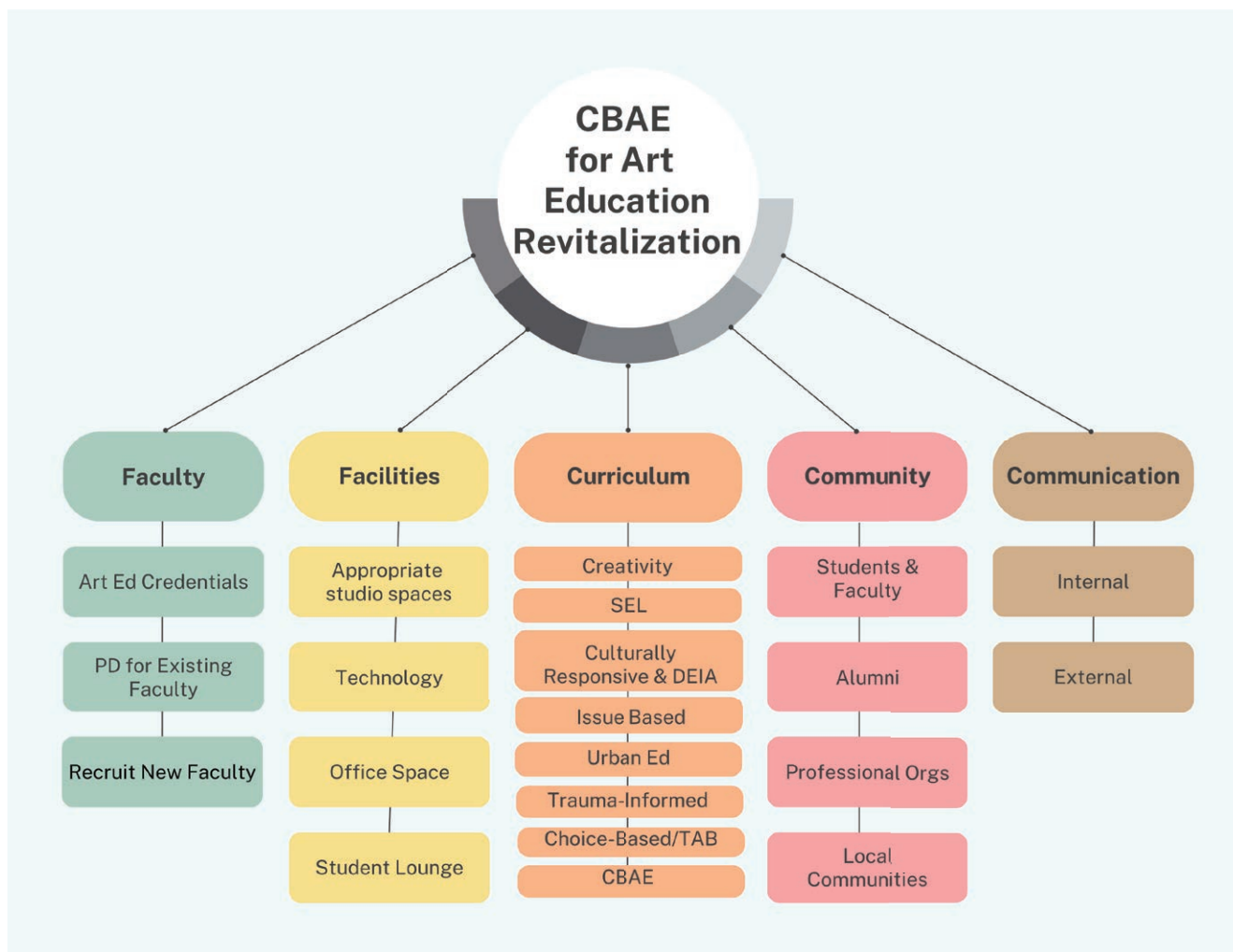
Figure 3. CBAE framework for curriculum revitalization.

Faculty

In CBAE, everything is made possible through the collaborative work of many individuals, taking advantage of our varied strengths and providing backup for our weaknesses. The same should be true of a collaborative faculty, in which everyone's assets can be fully utilized to make meaningful contributions to the program. Faculty members often dictate the quality of a program, and having full-time faculty members, as well as adjunct faculty members, who are adequately credentialed and offer a broad variety of expertise is essential to a flourishing department. Providing professional development for existing faculty members to remain current on emerging practices and recruiting new faculty members who can bring diverse expertise to the area is ideal. Further, having faculty members who are passionate about their work can attract and inspire students. CBAE's emphasis on in-depth research and responsiveness is also a worthwhile model for faculty members to follow.

My goal is to offer professional development to maintain current knowledge of emerging best practices in the field to existing faculty members and to recruit and hire faculty members with exceptional

credentials and potential. Being attentive to leadership principles for creatives will be useful for balance between challenge and stability, and to provide the time, energy, and resources that faculty members need to do their best work (Henry, 2018), which is particularly challenging in times of change.

Communities: This requires activation of existing faculty communities and potential new faculty members, who may be recruited by contacts at peer institutions. Creating a network among colleagues at peer institutions will be influential.

Curriculum

Characterized by deep research and responsiveness, CBAE provides a model for how programs can approach curricula to remain flexible and relevant. As one of the key structures that ensures consistency across the department and across time, curricula require a sturdy foundation and regular maintenance. Curricula should vary and be responsive to the needs of the particular region that a program serves. All art education programs require regular updates to anticipate the changing tides of educational policy and teacher preparation. Because CBAE

provides avenues for programs to cultivate socially relevant approaches to teaching that foster collective responsibility and social justice, utilized as a curricular framework, it can embolden art educators to "confront established perceptions of both art and education" (Schlemmer, 2017, p. 27).

The current curriculum at UArts has an existing emphasis on teaching students with disabilities and other special needs populations, as well as design thinking, as this is one of the existing strengths of the faculty. Emerging best practices are infused by individual instructors rather than built into formal curricular structures. The curricula are in particular need of updating to include a clear scope and sequence, core assessments for each class, as well as formalizing emergent practices such as social–emotional learning, Teaching for Artistic Behavior, culturally responsive teaching, community-based, issue-based, urban, trauma-informed, care ethics, and meaningful applications of creativity in art education. Incorporating creativity throughout the curriculum is necessary to align with the mission of the university and the renewed focus of the program. Further, borrowing from Anna Craft's (2015) characterization of creativity as wise and humane possibility thinking, we have an opportunity to subvert the market-based outcomes that often dominate dialogues about creativity in favor of iterations that foreground conscientious approaches to deploy innovation toward the imaginative resolution of social injustices. Toward these ends, future iterations of the curriculum will include coursework in creative collaboration, as well as rotating low-stakes creativity labs taught by a range of visiting artists, scholars, and educators to encourage experimentation and allow students to grapple with emerging ideas while the program maintains the flexibility to incorporate regularly new concepts and approaches.

Communities: Curriculum development involves the activation of both external and internal communities. External communities include the Pennsylvania Department of Education, the School District of Philadelphia and other local school districts, local art organizations, and peer organizations. Internally, curriculum development evokes the activation of existing students and faculty members, as well as other programs at UArts and administrators.

Community

Formal education in the United States, including teacher preparation programs, has a tendency to focus exclusively on the isolated and narrow confines of the classroom, which restricts the type of learning that takes place and results in schools that are "uninteresting and uninspiring" (Graham, 2009, as cited in Schlemmer, 2017, p. 27). In contrast, broadening the confines of teacher preparation to include community spaces offers expanded opportunities to connect theory and practice in meaningful and authentic ways. In my experience, for example, implementing CBAE into higher education coursework has the capacity to amplify a sense of belonging and shared responsibility while

enhancing retention and transfer through collaborative work in community settings (Blatt-Gross, 2023). In addition, my experiences at various types of academic institutions suggest that the most successful art education programs build on shared experiences within the current faculty and student body, and beyond through networks with schools and other colleges and universities. As the characteristic feature of CBAE, this model necessitates the development of more traditional forms of community; what might be defined as a shared sense of commonality and trust among individuals. Such networks should include current faculty members and students, the local NAEA student chapter, alumni, and connections to our state and national professional organizations, such as the Pennsylvania Art Education Association and Art Educators of New Jersey.

As an urban campus, UArts was virtual for almost 2 years due to the pandemic, and 2022–2023 was the first academic year that on-campus activity was the norm rather than the exception. As a result, the lack of face-to-face interaction weakened any sustained sense of community and represents an area that appears particularly in need of revitalization. Most graduate programs are struggling to attract students to on-campus events and to juggle the balance between working full time (which many of our students do) and attending school on evenings and weekends. The NAEA student chapter is currently inert. In an ongoing effort to embolden students and faculty members to become more involved, we will continue to sponsor events like Free Art Friday (a campus-wide scavenger hunt for free art) and student teaching exhibitions to encourage in-person participation and community building.

Communities: By definition, building community within and beyond the department will include a breadth of different populations, including current students and faculty members; alumni; other departments and schools; local school districts, including administrators, teachers, and staff; and local community organizations, as well as our professional organizations.

Communication

Communication is an essential piece of CBAE, which requires information gathering and distribution, agreeing on expectations, accepting feedback, and—most importantly—listening, as clear and expanded communication is an essential piece of all programs (and all collaborative, large-scale projects). Communication includes not just sending messages but also receiving them and being an attentive listener. Foundational to this project, listening sessions with faculty members, cooperating school districts, students, and alumni were essential to shaping the curriculum revisions, which were written collaboratively and offered for feedback to stakeholders at various points in the process.

Communication is essential to not just formulating curricula, but also the functioning of the department and the relationship building that keeps community-oriented programs afloat. In this

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attention economy, however, communication is complicated by the plethora of digital channels available, compounded by the information saturation that incites recipients to skim through messages rather than carefully reading content. At UArts, extensive communication is necessary to inform students about program, certification, and state requirements and to communicate with faculty members and administration. Raising the profile of our department within the university requires clever and deft communication skills. Internal and external communication needs bolstering and should take place in the form of emails, newsletters, posters, website updates, and social media. For the digital natives who comprise most of our student population, it is especially effective to "employ contemporary communication channels" (NAEA, 2021, p. 3). Because email communication is becoming less effective, new channels for reaching broad populations are necessary. Partnerships with marketing and alumni offices have implications for recruitment and enrollment. This is an appropriate arena to refine the personal, collaborative, public, and organizational voices required for leadership that reaches a variety of audiences (Thurber & Zimmerman, 2002).

Communities: Communication affects all communities, including relationships with faculty members and students, and internal departments, such as marketing, admissions, and alumni. External communities include alumni, influencers, prospective students and their parents, partner institutions, districts, and cooperating teachers.

Conclusion

Ultimately, this framework expands the aims of CBAE to create a meaningful context for learning, not just for individual projects in specific classes, but holistically throughout the program. By attending to context on a larger scale, we can potentially embed the entire student experience in collective meaning-making. This asset-driven approach prioritizes responsiveness, research, and cooperation with the goal of achieving a program that is educational, reciprocal, empowering, collaborative, and transformational (Lawton et al., 2019).

According to the NAEA Core Leadership Competencies, self-awareness includes "behaving with authenticity"; "know[ing] one's own ability, expertise, strengths, self-limitations and leadership style"; and activating personal interests and experiences as an educator and scholar (NAEA, 2021, p. 2). This framework provides not only a specific tool for revitalizing my own program, but is one that is potentially adaptable for others who might seek to create

more meaningful and enticing contexts for learning in their own programs. The next step at UArts is to overlay a framework for creativity on the program as a whole so it embodies and welcomes possibility thinking, play, and experimentation as much as it does the responsive, collaborative, asset-based thinking of CBAE. Finally, enacting both CBAE and creative thinking requires intense flexibility, as working on large-scale endeavors across departments and populations inevitably requires some compromise. By adapting CBAE holistically as a theoretical framework for rethinking how we train art educators, we might imbue our programs and our students with the tools that will enable them to both endure and flourish. ∎

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Discussion Questions

1. How can CBAE principles enhance teacher preparation programs to foster creative thinking and collaboration among future art educators? Discuss the implementation challenges and benefits of a CBAE-driven framework.

2. Outline and discuss specific strategies proposed in the article for revitalizing different aspects of an art + design education department, including facilities, faculty members, curricula, community engagement, and communication. How might these strategies be applicable to other educational contexts? Are there other curricular models that might be expanded?

3. In addressing challenges in urban teaching environments, how can a CBAE-driven approach help art educators navigate these unique circumstances and promote creativity within traditional educational systems? Share potential solutions and considerations for implementing such an approach.

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